

# The Gunman and the Ape

*by* Sally Houtman

I.

You tell yourself at 3 a.m. it's not your fault, it's not your age;  
that obsolescence is a phase you're going through. You try to sleep  
but can't because the permafrost is melting, because you can't  
tune out the tantric rumble from the apartment next door,  
because there is a fist-shaped hole in the wall  
above your bed where your conscience used to be.

II.

So you count sheep, count blessings; thank god  
for incongruity, for the paradox of appetite and famine,  
for the synergy of empathy and rage. You count by tens,  
count backwards, rewind your life, but the reel  
becomes the reflection inside the reflection inside the reflection;  
the past, no more than a parking fine you forgot to pay,  
the future, an abandoned warehouse at the corner  
of *why bother* and *who cares*.

III.

You wonder where it all went wrong. You marched in step  
from 9 to 5, kept perfect pace, pledged allegiance to enforced  
mediocrity,  
until the day they let you go—the day you knew that you were never  
Buddy Holly on their plane; just another passenger, brilliant but  
doomed.

That day you drove too fast through school zones, touched wet paint,  
stared directly at the sun, because you could, because you finally  
understood  
that there were no rules, only suggestions.

IV.

---

Available online at *«<http://fictionaut.com/stories/sally-houtman/the-gunman-and-the-ape--4>»*  
Copyright © 2012 Sally Houtman. All rights reserved.

You rise at 5, fill your plate with free-range eggs and a side  
of indecision, bite back the dull uniformity of it all.  
You contemplate the fretwork of your hand—the thin genetic thread  
that divides you from your simian predecessors,  
from the lone gunman on a turreted roof.

V.

At 5:19 you hold tight to your fork. You can't stop  
thinking about the gunman and the ape; you can't stop  
wondering how you'll do it, how you will manage,  
how you will defend yourself when all you have left  
is a keyboard and a grudge.

